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Title: The Polish Ethnographic Atlas : research achievements and prospects

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Citation style: Pieńczak Agnieszka. (2016). The Polish Ethnographic Atlas : research achievements and prospects. "Ethnologia Actualis" (Vol. 15, iss. 2 (2016), s. 81-94), doi 10.1515/eas-2015-0018



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The Polish Ethnographic Atlas: Research Achievements and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

In 1998, the source materials of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas – collected over many decades with the participation of the Institute of History of Material Culture (a unit of the Polish Academy of Sciences) and several leading ethnological centres – were moved to the Cieszyn Branch of the University of Silesia (currently the Faculty of Ethnology and Education). It was then that Z. Kłodnicki, the editor of the PEA, came up with the idea to continue and finish the atlas studies. However, the work on fulfilling the PEA, the biggest project in the history of Polish ethnology, is still going on.

Nowadays, the materials of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas constitute a precious, unique in the national scale, documentary base. For several years, a lively cooperation has taken place between the PEA staff (representing the Faculty of Ethnology and Education of the University of Silesia) and various cultural institutions, government and non-government organizations. The discussed projects are usually aimed at the preservation and protection of the cultural heritage of the Polish village as well as the broadly related promotion actions for activating local communities.

The workers of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas since 2014 have been also implementing the Ministry grant entitled *The Polish Ethnographic Atlas – scientific elaboration, electronic database, publication of the sources in the Internet, stage I* (scientific supervision: Ph.D. Agnieszka Pieńczak). What is an integral assumption of the discussed project is the scientific elaboration of three electronic catalogues, presenting the PEA resources: 1) field photographs (1955-1971) 2) the questionnaires concerning folk collecting (1948-1952), 3. the published maps (1958-2013). These materials have been selected due to their documentary value. The undertaking has brought about some measurable effects, mostly the special digital platform www.archiwumpae.us.edu.pl. This material database of

ethnographic data might become the basis for designing various non-material activities aimed at preserving the cultural heritage of the Polish village.

KEY WORDS: ethnology, Polish Ethnographic Atlas, Polish village, protection and preservation of cultural heritage, digitalization

The subject matter of the presented study is associated with Zygmunt Kłodnicki's article published in the international journal *Ethnologia Europae Centralis* ten years ago (KŁODNICKI 2005). However, a lot have changed in the profile of the scientific research of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas (PEA) conducted unceasingly since the end of the 20th century. In 1998, the source materials concerning the Polish rural culture – collected over many decades with the participation of the Institute of History of Material Culture (a unit of the Polish Academy of Sciences) and several leading ethnological centres – were moved to the Cieszyn Branch of the University of Silesia (currently the Faculty of Ethnology and Education). It was then that Z. Kłodnicki, the editor of the PEA, came up with the idea to continue and finish the atlas studies.

Aided by students, I have completed the research into demonology, folk knowledge and beliefs and neighbour support. In this way, the field studies for the PEA have been finished. With the help of students and doctoral students, the maps and comments on birth customs, rituals and beliefs have been prepared. They are intended for print in the nearest years (KŁODNICKI 2005:100).

However, the work on fulfilling the PEA, the biggest project in the history of Polish ethnology, is still going on.

The specificity of PEA research work

The specificity of PEA research work and the potentialities of applying atlas materials have been largely discussed over the last several years¹. What should be reminded here is that the research activity of the PEA is based on two mainstays: the documentary one (collecting fieldwork materials, museum and library search) and the interpretative one (elaborating appropriate systematics which take into account various forms and varieties of the

¹ See: e.g. KŁODNICKI 2001a, 2001c, 2005, 2013; PIEŃCZAK 2009, 2010, 2011b, 2011c; DROŻDŻ 2011; PIEŃCZAK, DIAKOWSKA-KOHUT 2013. For a detailed list of earlier works concerning atlas studies, see: KŁODNICKI 2005:102-104.

investigated phenomena, preparing maps and concluding on the basis of the spatial ethnographic image). The first stage has been already completed – therefore, the Cieszyn Atlas Unit has rich ethnographic archives, the only of such a size in Poland. The collection comprises several thousands of interview questionnaires, surveys, fieldwork photographs and other archival materials, obtained by Polish ethnologists in the second half of the 20th century nearly all over Poland². The second mainstay of the atlas activity concerns the elaboration of the collected source materials in the form of maps and some corresponding commentaries as well as in the form of special electronic catalogues, which will be discussed later. Preparing the maps requires the earlier systematization of cultural phenomena in regard to particular qualities (mainly the function or form, sometimes also the material and technique). Chronology, the frequency of occurrence and dialectal vocabulary are also important (KŁODNICKI 2013:86). What can be frequently seen on maps are more or less regular spatial configurations of the analysed phenomena, which with the application of the ethnogeographic method might become the basis for concluding about the dynamics of cultural changes. Yet, this necessitates both certain research mindfulness as well as a critical approach to the analysed material, which was deservedly focused on by Kazimierz Moszyński – a pioneer of this method in Poland.

What constitutes the basis of the geographic method is the fact – the simplest example is taken here – that with the passing time, the differently lasting phases of a particular artefact, which came into being in a certain point of the Earth, get decomposed in the spatial platform by expanding in different directions. The geographical ranges of all the changeability phases of this artefact hardly ever agree with each other. Taking the simplest example again, it can be observed that the oldest phases usually reach the furthest; the later – slightly nearer; the latest – still nearer from the starting point. Due to this, the chronological order of the phases gets replaced by the spatial one over the centuries. Geographically examining the ranges of phases, an ethnographer or an ethnologist reconstructs the history of a particular artefact (MOSZYŃSKI 1958:105).

The discussed method is successfully applied and developed in the research work of the Cieszyn centre. The results of these studies are presented not only in *The Commentaries on the Polish Ethnographic Atlas* but also in a few articles dedicated to particular

² These works lasted with some breaks from 1948 (questionnaire studies on folk collecting) to the beginning of the 21st century (supplementary field studies in north-eastern Poland).

problems³. Many of them are provided with another mappings, which enriches the wealth of Polish ethnographic cartography.

The cartographic output of the PEA (1958-2013)

What is an integral part of the PEA output are the maps presenting cultural diversification of Poland in the spatial aspect. Undoubtedly, one of major atlas achievements is the publishing of 770 maps (prepared by 45 authors), out of which over a half was done over the last several years. Initially, the atlas research was done under Józef Gajek's scientific supervision and this resulted in publishing a sample booklet and six large-format books of the PEA⁴. This wrapped up the first cycle of the presentation of maps on folk collecting, animal farming, agriculture, food, clothes, building and some other artefacts. Since the nineties of the 20th century, the series of *The Commentaries on the Polish Ethnographic Atlas* has been issued, which constitutes an important text supplement of the maps concerning the spiritual and social culture.⁵

What is worth doing here is showing the scale of the PEA activities over the last fifty years. The diagram of the publishing activity suggests that the number of the maps published by the PEA gradually grew in 1958-1965, showing a slightly falling tendency in the next period (1967-1999). In 2002 the publishing activity increased over 2.5 times in comparison to 1999, which was followed by a steady decrease in the next years of the 20th century (see Figure 1). However, it should be emphasized that the earlier maps came into being in Wrocław owing to a large team (in 1958-1999 - 12 people on average), which focused entirely on the atlas activity. The maps prepared in Cieszyn have been done by 7 people - either the workers or graduates of the University of Silesia (in 2002-2013 - 2 people on average)⁶. The data also show that in 1967 the biggest number of people took part in preparing maps and that in the next year their number was gradually falling (see Figure 1). In 2007 and 2009 this number reached the indication 1 (authorial elaborations). Still, the melting human potential does not result in a small number of mappings. The remaining unpublished cartograms, originally meant for print in the form of the booklet

³ See: e.g. KŁODNICKI 2001b; PIEŃCZAK 2008, 2011a; PIEŃCZAK, DIAKOWSKA 2011; DROŻDŻ, 2007, 2011, 2013; DIAKOWSKA, 2011.

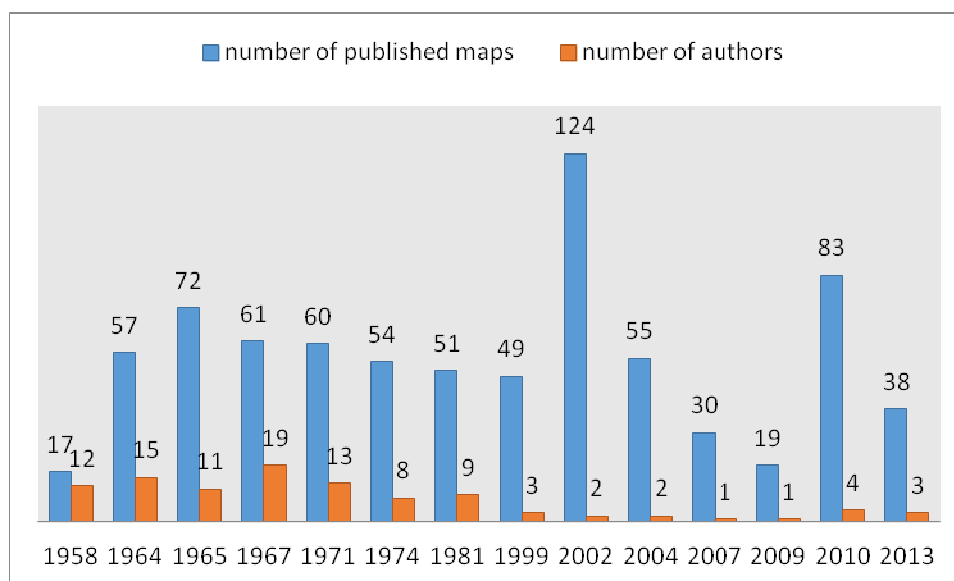
⁴ GAJEK (ed.), 1964-1981.

⁵ 13 volumes of the series have been published so far, out of which 7 in Cieszyn (see LEBEDA [PIEŃCZAK] 2002; DROŻDŻ, PIEŃCZAK 2004; PIEŃCZAK 2007; DROŻDŻ 2002, 2009; KŁODNICKI, PIEŃCZAK (eds.) 2010, 2013.

⁶ In Cieszyn, many dozens of maps prepared by students in B.A. and M.A. theses have come into being.

VII-IX, are in the PEA archives in Cieszyn (see: KŁODNICKI, 2001: 244-254). After earlier verification, some of them have been used⁷. What is planned for the future is the preparation of the next volumes of *The Commentaries* dedicated to wedding and birth customs, demonology and some other issues⁸.

Figure 1: *The relationship between the number of the published PEA maps and number of their authors (1958-2013)*



Source: own elaboration

⁷ In the case of wedding rituals, some of the earlier PEA maps were applied – only the data from the 19th century literature were taken into account as well as information from the permanent research network, see: DROŻDŻ, PIEŃCZAK 2004; PIEŃCZAK 2007; DROŻDŻ 2009. Many issues associated with this subject matter have been elaborated anew.

⁸ The editorial works on *The Commentaries* have been temporarily suspended due to the implementation of the research project entitled *The Polish Ethnographic Atlas – scientific elaboration, electronic database, publication of the sources in the Internet, stage I*, (see: the further part of the article).

Participation in research projects on the protection and preservation of the national heritage

Nowadays, the materials of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas constitute a precious, unique in the national scale, documentary base. For several years, a lively cooperation has taken place between the PEA staff (representing the Faculty of Ethnology and Education of the University of Silesia) and various cultural institutions, government and non-government organizations. The discussed projects are usually aimed at the preservation and protection of the cultural heritage of the Polish village as well as the broadly related promotion actions for activating local communities (see Table 1). In all the described cases, the PEA materials, obtained directly from the depositaries of local traditions, have become the foundation of different scientific and science popularizing works.

Table 1: Participation of the PEA staff in selected research projects (2010-2015)

Research year	Project title	Financial source	Type of participation	Effects
2010	<i>The ways of preserving the wooden architecture of rural territories at the feet of the Beskids at the Polish-Slovakian borderland</i> contractor: (coordinator: Fundacja Kamojowa in Suszec)	Programme of Transfrontier Cooperation Republic of Poland – Republic of Slovakia 2007-2013 – Support for local initiatives (microprojects)	contractor: Agnieszka Pieńczak	Participation in the international conference <i>The ways of preserving the wooden architecture of rural territories at the feet of the Beskids at the Polish-Slovakian borderland</i> ; popular science publication <i>Stan badań Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego nad kulturą ludową Suszcy i Kryr (II połowa XX wieku)</i> / <i>The state of PEA research on folk culture of Suszec and Kryry (the 2nd half of the 20th century/</i> (2010)
2012	<i>In the land of drowned spirits and carnival bear leading – the</i>	Regional Operational Programme of the	contractors: Agnieszka Pieńczak,	Two popular science articles: <i>Od wieńca</i>

AGNIESZKA PIEŃCZAK

The Polish Ethnographic Atlas: Research Achievements and Prospects

	<i>promotion of Silesian folk culture – the case of customs, rituals and legends from Gliwice County</i> (coordinator: County Office in Gliwice)	Silesian Voivodeship for 2007-2013	ethnology students of the University of Silesia	<i>adwentowego do dożynkowego czyli tradycje, zwyczaje i obrzędy powiatu gliwickiego /From the advent to harvest wreath – the traditions, customs and rituals of Gliwice County/</i> (2012); <i>O diable złośliwym i utopku życzliwym czyli legendy i wierzenia powiatu gliwickiego /On a mischievous devil and a nice drowned spirit – legends and beliefs of Gliwice County/</i> (2012)
2012-2013	<i>Atlas of the non-material cultural heritage of rural Greater Poland</i> (coordinator: nationam Museum of Agriculture and Agro-Food-Processing Industry in Szreniawa)	National Programme for the Development of Humanities (Ministry of Science and Higher Education)	contractors: UŚ. Zygmunt Kłodnicki, Edyta Diakowska-Kohut	participation in the Scientific Board of the project, providing opinions, reviewing, expert supervision of the course of scientific inquiries (Z. Kłodnicki), scientific inquiry into PEA materials concerning a few Greater Poland counties (E. Diakowska-Kohut)
2013-2015	<i>Atlas of Polish folk costumes: the continuation of publishing works, conducting field studies and source inquiries as well as digitalization of source materials and sharing them in the Internet</i>	National Programme for the Development of Humanities (Ministry of Science and Higher Education)	contractor: Anna Drożdż	scientific inquiry into PEA sources concerning folk costumes

	(coordinator: Anna Brzezińska)			
2015	<i>The year of household farming in the Pszczyna region</i> (coordinator: Town Museum in Pszczyna)	Cultural heritage – Folk and traditional culture (Ministry of Culture and National Heritage)	contractors: Agnieszka Pieńczak, Edyta Diakowska-Kohut	Sharing source materials concerning household farming in the villages: Kryry and Suszec

Digitalization and sharing of the PEA collections – the research status quo

The workers of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas have not only taken part in outer projects but since 2014 have been also implementing the Ministry grant entitled *The Polish Ethnographic Atlas – scientific elaboration, electronic database, publication of the sources in the Internet, stage I*, within the National Programme for the Development of Humanities (scientific supervision: Agnieszka Pieńczak). The University of Silesia along with the Institute of Anthropology (a project partner) have been granted some substantial funds for scientific elaboration and digitalization of the atlas collections (547 878 000 PLN, which equals about 127 413 000 Euro). The major aim of this undertaking is starting long-term research into enriching the cultural and national heritage with the unique ethnographic documentation of several recent decades. This will become possible due to scientific elaboration of the PEA archives into a coherent and synthetic digital collection. These materials are unique sources concerning the history of rural Poland as, contrary to other ethnographic studies, they thematically comprise the whole Poland, which allows for highly developed scientific analyses of cultural diversification of rural areas. What seems of particular significance here is the protection and preservation of the cultural heritage of the Polish village by sharing the PEA materials with a wide group of recipients. These activities seem of due significance also in the context of implementing the resolutions of the UNESCO convention on the protection of the non-material cultural heritage, which Poland ratified in 2003⁹.

⁹ For the full text of the convention, see: http://niematerialne.nid.pl/Konwencja_UNESCO/Tekst%20Konwencji%20o%20ochronie%20dziedzictwa%20niematerialnego/, /accessed: 18.10.2015/.

What is an integral assumption of the discussed project is the scientific elaboration of three electronic catalogues, presenting the PEA resources: 1) field photographs (1955-1971) 2) the questionnaires concerning folk collecting (1948-1952), 3) the published maps (1958-2013). These materials have been selected due to their documentary value. The undertaking has brought about some measurable effects, mostly the special digital platform www.archiwumpae.us.edu.pl, which is aimed at cataloguing the collections and at the digitalization workshop of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas (prepared and equipped owing to the support from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education and the Faculty of Ethnology and Education in Cieszyn of the University of Silesia).

During several months of the project implementation, some preliminary works have been done for conservation and itemization of the collections. The digitalization of the published atlas maps and many thousands of black and white field photographs is winding down as well (Figure 2).



Figure 2: *Scanning atlas photographs. Photo: A. Pieńczak. Cieszyn, 13th May, 2015*

A part of the map collection has been subjected to complex digital edition in the Galeneo programme¹⁰ and the laborious and time consuming research activities have started with the aim of creating a photographic catalogue (see Figure 3).¹¹ In this case as well it was necessary to prepare the collection for scanning earlier – this required securing the archives, attributing new inventory numbers, verifying erroneous spelling of place names or the existing signatures. It is estimated that the PEA Unit in Cieszyn has 12 555 inventory cards with photographs coming from 439 villages in Poland. They constitute a unique ethnographic documentation, which presents some elements of everyday life of rural communities all over the country, including the western and northern territories, subjected to particular migration movements after World War II¹². Most frequently, the photographs¹³ show agricultural tools, building, means of transport, interior equipment, clothing elements, graveyard architecture and many other artefacts, some of which already belong to the past.¹⁴

¹⁰ It comprises a metadata Dublin Core set, which consists of 14 elements and is enriched with detailed labels, electronic files and the system of geolocalization of an object.

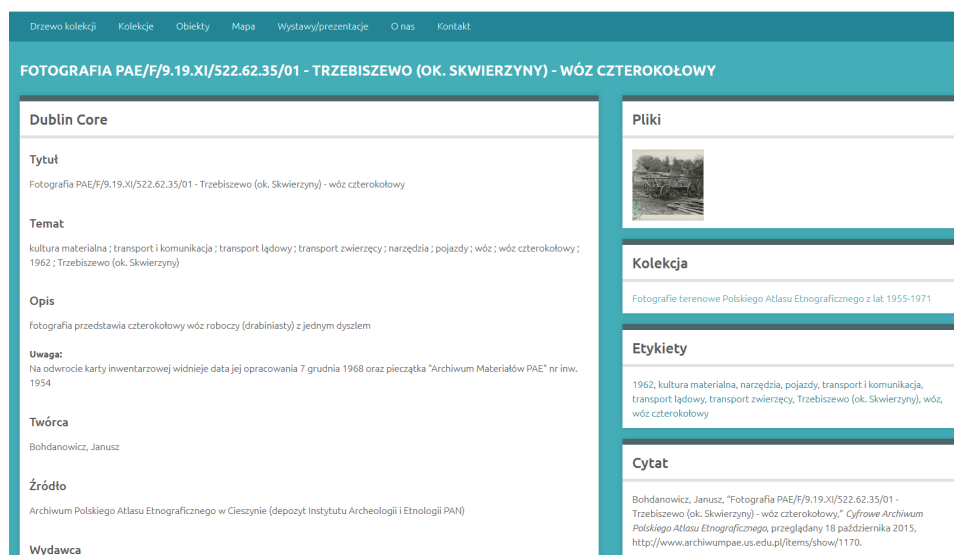
¹¹ The research is conducted by the scientific staff of the Faculty of Ethnology and Education of the University of Silesia (Cieszyn), supported by the representatives of the Polish Institute of Anthropology (Warsaw), the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Warsaw) and the Polish association for Folk Studies (Wrocław). There are 10 participants in the project, including 4 main contractors (Agnieszka Pieńczak, Zygmunt Kłodnicki, Joanna Koźmińska, Edyta Diakowska-Kohut). For the detailed information concerning the members of the research team, see: <http://www.archiwumpae.us.edu.pl/exhibits/show/uczestnicy-projektu--polski-at>, (accessed: 18.10.2015).

¹² An outflow of autochthonous population and the settlement of the Polish population from different parts of the country, which largely included the population coming from the eastern territories lost in favour of the Soviet republics of Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania.

¹³ An outflow of autochthonous population and the settlement of the Polish population from different parts of the country, which largely included the population coming from the eastern territories lost in favour of the Soviet republics of Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania.

¹⁴ The discussed collections will be successively shared in the Internet, depending on the possibility of obtaining the authors' (or their heirs') consents for publication.

Figure 3: Presentation of the PEA photographic catalogue in the Galeneo programme (an object from the village of Trzebiszewo) (source: <http://www.archiwumpae.us.edu.pl/items/show/1170>, screenshot, accessed: 18.10.2015)



What has also been initiated is the digitalization of nearly 3 000 questionnaires with herbaria, which is the oldest collection of atlas data (1948-1952). As in the previous case, at first specialist conservation of the objects took place and then scientific verification was carried out. Currently the herbaria are being photographed and graphically processed.

Developmental prospects

The sources of the Cieszyn Unit of the PEA are not broadly known in Central European ethnology, therefore converting them into a modern digital form seems by all means useful. What will come into being owing to the efforts of the PEA Unit in Cieszyn is an innovative database, which is valuable not only because of its organization and contents but mainly because of its accessibility. This material database of ethnographic data might become the basis for designing various non-material activities aimed at preserving the cultural heritage of the Polish village. Our major aim has always been the popularization of the rich sources of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas in the scientific and non-scientific environment. This, however, requires many years of research work.

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